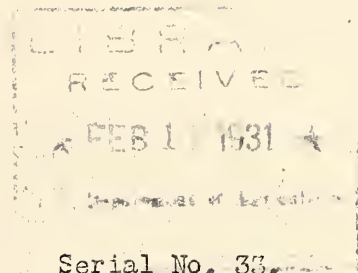


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Excerpt from a radio talk by
W. W. Vincent, chief, western district
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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Spices

War, romance, and history are tied up in the spice business. Spices were one of the first food commodities men searched for in the early days of civilization. The earliest explorers are said to have paid almost as much attention to spices as they did to their search for gold.

When you speak of spices, you include all aromatic vegetable products which are used for the seasoning of food. The Government standard requires that they be clean, sound, true to name, and that from them has been removed no portion of their volatile oil or other flavoring principle. Not all spices are cultivated. Some are products of wild trees and plants. For example, Malay Cassia Bark and Calamus Root.

These aromatic vegetable substances come from different sources of the plant. For example, the clove is a flower bud. Ginger, horseradish, and turmeric come from roots or underground stems. Pepper, capsicum, cumin seed, and celery seed are the fruits of plants, while the nutmeg is the dried seed. Cinnamon and cassia are ground from the bark of plants, while sage and thyme come from the leaves, or leaves and flowering tops, of plants. Perhaps I had better tell you something about the more common spices.

There is allspice. Many people believe it is a mixture of spices. Such is not the case. Allspice is the dried, unripe fruit of the pimento tree, which tree belongs to the same family as the clove tree. It gets its name from the fact that it has been said to have the odor of all the spices.

Black pepper, common to household usage, is the dried, immature berry of the wooded vine pepper plant which grows in the East Indian Islands, other parts of the Malay Archipelago, and Southern India. As the product reaches you, it consists of nothing other than the ground immature pepper berry. I know of no way by which the consumer can tell what variety of pepper he is receiving except as may be indicated upon the label. White pepper is made from the mature pepper berry. It differs from black pepper in that it is allowed to mature on the tree and the outer covering of the pepper berry is then removed before the product is ground. The removal of this outer coating is accomplished by bruising and washing or scrubbing off the pulpy matter. Black pepper is usually stronger, that is, hotter, than white pepper. Cayenne pepper differs from these mentioned in that it is one of the small-fruited species of capsicum. A product labeled, Cayenne pepper, must be made from the small-fruited species of capsicum, but a product labeled red pepper may be from any species of capsicum. Ordinarily, you will find cayenne pepper to be stronger than a product labeled, red pepper.

Paprika, one of the most esteemed of our spices, is the dried ripe fruit of *Capsicum Annuum*. We receive two kinds, Spanish and Hungarian. The mildest, sweetest, richest in oil, is the Hungarian Rosepaprika or Rosa paprika, as it is sometimes called, and that is made by grinding the selected pods of the plant. Before grinding, the placenta, stalk and stems are removed. Koenigspaprika, or King's paprika it is sometimes labeled, is the next highest grade of Hungarian paprika. In its preparation, there is ground with the unselected pods both the seeds and stems. When you see the words, "With added Olive Oil," appearing on paprika labels you may know that such has been added for the purpose of enhancing the red color. It serves no other purpose.

Curry powder has no definite standard of composition, but is a combination of Cayenne pepper, and other spices, which render the food heating and stimulating. Among the ingredients generally found in curry powder are, in addition to the Cayenne pepper, ginger, black pepper, cardamon, cloves, cumin, turmeric, and others. Curry powder finds its most extensive use in India, many of the choicest recipes for lamb, rice and curry originating there.

Cinnamon is the bark of either the cinnamon or cassia tree. Its quality is determined not only by the strength and amount of oil, but particularly by the quality of the flavor. Naturally, those barks containing the highest quantity of oil are the best for flavoring preparations and some contain so little as to be practically worthless. Ceylon cinnamon is an orange-yellow, mildly flavored product. Saigon cinnamon is darker, more brown in color, and has a strong, pungent and excellent flavor. Batavia cinnamon is light brown in color and represents a good grade. China cinnamon is frequently very dark. It is probably the poorest of all cinnamons and frequently the flavor is almost entirely lacking. When buying cinnamon, if you would be certain of securing a high-grade product, look for a declaration of the name or variety. If it is not declared, ask to taste it. A product labeled, cinnamon, and unqualified, may be China cinnamon, or a mixture of China and some other cinnamon with the China predominating. You should know that cinnamon deteriorates upon standing and your package should be kept closed.

Nutmegs are the dried hard seeds of the nutmeg tree and contain no less than 25% of fixed oil. Many of the nutmegs that come to this country are shrivelled in appearance, but the normal ones are well rounded and symmetrical. The shrivelled nuts, or "Shrivels", as they are known in the trade, make a good ground product which is usually slightly darker in color than the powder produced from the unshrivelled seeds.

Mace, as you receive it, is the powder made by grinding the dried coating which surrounds the nutmeg in its shell. The shell of the nutmeg has no condimental value. Two varieties of mace are generally available: the East Indian, a yellowish-brown to dark brown product having an excellent flavor, and the West Indian mace, a light yellow colored product and generally of poorer flavor than the East Indian. If you buy by color, ordinarily the light colored mace will not be of such high quality as the darker colored product.

Sage is the ground dried leaf of the sage plant. Most of the sage you receive is of the Austrian, French, Italian, and Dalmatian varieties. Other sages occasionally reach our shores, such as Greek sage and Spanish sage, but neither of these is of the species which the Department permits to be sold as sage, unqualified, since they are inferior varieties. Remember, if you desire a superior sage, it would be well to look for the word "Dalmatian," "French," or "Italian" upon the label.

Cheap spices are not the best buys. Look for the net contents statement on the label. You will find that the standardized containers used in the spice trade bear various net-contents statements. Many of them are slack-filled and, in order that you be certain that you get your money's worth, it is necessary that you compare net-contents statements between the competitive products. Particularly is this true with regard to nutmeg, mace and cinnamon.

